



**Meeting with the City of Wausau
Wednesday, September 22, 2004, 1:30 – 3:00 pm**

People in attendance

Casey Newman, WisDOT BOP
Arun Rao, WisDOT BOP
Dave Meurett, WisDOT BOP
Brad Marguardt, City of Wausau
Glenn Speich, Marathon County
Greg Seubert, Wausau Area Transit System
Joe Pribanich, City of Wausau, Planner
Irv Sumner, City of Wausau Planning Commission
Matt Halada, WisDOT District 4
John Hess, City of Wausau Department of Public Works

- 1) Overview of WisDOT's meeting purpose and WisDOT's long-range plan, *Connections 2030*, by WisDOT staff: The meeting began at 1:30 with introductions. Casey Newman, WisDOT, gave an overview of WisDOT's long-range plan *Connections 2030*. WisDOT is seeking input on transportation planning issues from larger Wisconsin cities at this point. *Connections 2030* is scheduled to be completed in 2006.
- 2) Gathering of input from City of Wausau: Staff from the City of Wausau answered the following questions and will send WisDOT.
 - a. Current transportation and development issues in Wausau.

Road Improvements and Traffic Issues

- Wausau staff emphasized the need for getting local traffic off of the state system. The City has worked to develop an outer ring/loop roadway around the area to accomplish this. This loop, however, is not complete and city staff stressed the need for a north end bridge crossing of the Wisconsin River to complete this loop, which they feel is a project the state should participate. The city stressed that this is a top priority, with large sums of money already spent on planning studies. The city would like WisDOT to be a better partner in the study process, funding for studies, and coordination.
- City staff expressed the need in general for more commitment from the state, county, etc when they do planning activities.

- Marathon County staff emphasized, at the south end of the loop road system, the need to look at the locations of a Fox Glove Rd. bridge over the Wisconsin River and a new I-39 overpass to better facilitate the local system before WisDOT spends money to reconstruct the existing I-39 overpass.
- At the north end of the loop, the proposed Decatur Dr. bridge will need to be constructed so it aligns with the existing local road system. Staff stated coordination with WisDOT must occur earlier in the process. Staff stressed that the bridge is a regional project, not just a local needs project.
- Staff stated that the city and the MPO have had difficulty working together on planning for the north end bridge.

Land Use and Growth Issues

- The City is landlocked to the south by other communities.
- Growth to the east is slow because of topography but some expansion is occurring. Two large subdivisions are proposed along 41st Street.
- Weston is growing together with Wausau on the 41st Street corridor on the east side.
- To the west, there is more commercial and industrial growth, including the expansion of the business park to 350 acres (a boat manufacturer has recently moved in to the park).
- The land use plan identifies the Westside business park as the best area for industrial development.
- For residential growth, the northeast side is ripe for development, and this ties in with the north bridge project. There is a new high school on the northeast side. Northwest of the City is also an area of future residential development.
- The city would like to look into building a Highway O interchange. A new Highway 29 interchange is needed between 72nd Street and Highway 107.
- STH 52 east of Wausau is a direct route for a rapidly developing area with a new high school. There are now capacity problems on 52, and city staff would like it to become an urban style street as opposed to rural.
- Reconstruction of Business Highway 51 South/Grand Ave. is in the long-term scope. More people are using this as a thoroughfare, and it is currently operating at less than level C during peak times.

Transit

- Staff stated that the population is aging, and the need for public transit is increasing.
- City staff noted that there is an incongruity in what we are spending on transit and the growing need.

- The Wausau transit has a history of regionalism, and already crosses municipal lines. Wausau transit provides service for Rothschild and Schofield, and they are in discussions with Weston to provide service. Transit staff would like a regional transit authority, but the question of who pays would need to be addressed. The city would like to see state enabling legislation for regional transit authorities, particularly because of their desire to get off of the property tax. Transit staff would like to see revenue-raising authority for a transit authority. Wausau transit wants the ability to get off the property tax to give it flexibility (and stability) in making decisions.
- Wausau recently experienced the elimination of Greyhound service. Staff emphasized again that regional transportation is a great idea, and a transit authority would help. Greyhound usage was not that great, and the service became less convenient, and less frequent in recent year. They gradually starved the service to death (service was eliminated to the center of town years ago). In terms of intercity buses, serving the downtown is important, since that is where the demand is for this kind of service.
- The city is designing a new transit center in Wausau.
- Transit staff would like to start looking at transit alternatives; they haven't looked at any alternatives in the past 5 years, but noted that there are limited financial resources. The way the city is developing is not conducive to a fixed route system, but demand is increasing. Transit staff noted that the sprawling development of the city is not efficient for transit. Staff pointed out that a demand response system is very expensive and inefficient, and that it costs much more money than a fixed route system.
- The city has made cuts on paratransit services, and ridership has decreased proportionally. But the need for these services has not gone away. Passengers shifted from the city program to the county program.

County Transit

The county has combined all transportation under one umbrella. IT is being run but the county healthcare center. The county system has mostly elderly and disabled users; there are no services used by the general public.

Pedestrian/ Bike Issues/ Safe routes to school

- Some staff proposed licensing bikes, stating that users of bike facilities, which are mostly recreational, should contribute financially to the cost of building and maintaining them. City and County staff emphasized the need for a funding mechanism for bike facilities. Staff felt that the state should lead in developing a funding mechanism for bike/pedestrian facilities.

- The city is looking at new bike paths, including Stewart Avenue lanes.
- Staff stated there is a need for more paved shoulders, etc., because people don't feel safe riding bikes on the road.
- Staff agreed that bicycle and pedestrian facilities are in high demand, but people oppose them if they are in their back yard. No one wants the facilities on their street, and no one wants to pay.
- The new high school has bike and pedestrian access problems. There is a 1.5-mile stretch along the route to school with no sidewalk, but this stretch is located in a township, so Wausau has no jurisdiction. The new school also has bad access for pedestrian and bicycles, as there is a huge traffic increase for the area (18th Street). 18th Street has been repaved, but as a rural road with gravel shoulders and ditches.

Future Growth:

- Sewer boundaries are driving growth in the area; developers are planning around the sewer/water corridor.
- Schools drive growth – Highway 52 will need improvements.
- The east, northwest and northeast sides of the city are large growth areas for residential (medium density) development.

Freight Issues

- The city gets requests from businesses in the Wausau Westside Business Park for rail access. But staff noted that rail is “on the downswing” in the area, and there is more truck traffic on the highways.
- Rail shipment is too expensive for the county (interconnect city charges to get into Wausau), so the county is moving to trucks for their freight needs.
- There is only one train per week on the Canadian National (CN) line serving Wausau.
- Dealing with CN is a problem for area businesses relying on rail for shipping.
- The railroad is pricing itself out of the market.
- Highways 52 and 51 are experiencing heavy truck traffic going through downtown, using it as a throughway. This is a problem for the city; the trucks should be on the higher capacity highways.
- County staff noted that there are more trucks using Highway N instead of Highway 29 for unknown reasons. The truck traffic is damaging the shoulders on Highway N. County staff stated that WisDOT wants to open county roads to 53-foot trailers with double bottoms, which are currently banned on county highways. Trucking issues are a growing problem on local roads. Staff feels that WisDOT is putting truck traffic onto the local system
- Trucks are running overweight. There is not enough enforcement, and it costs less for truckers to break the law.